



Disaster and Emergency Management Resources

Introduction to Tornadoes

Definition

A tornado is a violent windstorm characterized by a twisting, funnel-shaped cloud. It is spawned by a thunderstorm (or sometimes as a result of a hurricane) and produced when cool air overrides a layer of warm air, forcing the warm air to rise rapidly.

Tornado Facts

- Tornado season is generally March through August although tornadoes can occur at any time of year.
- They tend to occur in the afternoons and evenings: more than 80 percent of all tornadoes strike between noon and midnight.
- Tornadoes strike with incredible velocity. Wind speeds may approach 300 miles per hour. These winds can uproot trees and structures and turn harmless objects into deadly missiles, all in a matter of seconds. Mobile homes are particularly vulnerable to tornadoes.
- Injury or deaths related to tornadoes most often occur when buildings collapse, when people are hit by flying objects, or when they are caught trying to escape.
- Tornadoes are most destructive when they touch ground. Normally, a tornado will stay on the ground for no more than 20 minutes; however, one tornado can touch ground several times in different areas.
- An approaching cloud of debris can mark the location of a tornado even if a funnel is not visible.
- Before a tornado hits, the wind may die down and the air may become very still.
- Tornadoes generally occur near the trailing edge of a thunderstorm. It is not uncommon to see clear, sunlit skies behind a tornado.

Tornado Watches and Warnings

- A **tornado watch** is issued when tornadoes are possible in your area. Remain alert for approaching storms.
- A **tornado warning** is issued when a tornado has been sighted or indicated by weather radar.

Adapted from resource material developed by the National Weather Service